

*This chapter is dedicated to my
daughter, Ashley, and my son,
Andrew.*



It's great that you've made the healthy decision to get fit. Now you might ask, "Where do I go to get fit?" There are several options available to you including the following:

- **a local community center**
- **a local YMCA, YWCA or JCC**
- **a worksite or corporate fitness center**
- **a commercial fitness facility (a health club, fitness center or gym)**

(Note: Although the forthcoming discussions will focus on commercial fitness facilities, most of the considerations and recommendations are applicable to the other options.)

THE FITNESS FACILITY

In looking for a fitness facility, you should shop around and tour several sites. Joining a facility is an investment in your health and quality of life. Purchasing a membership is an investment of time and money. Therefore, you want to be thorough when doing your research. This means that you should ask a lot of questions in order to help you make an informed decision. In doing your research, consider the reputation of the facility. Does it have a good one? Perhaps you know someone who's a current member.

The Tour

When you visit a facility, you'll get a tour. It should consist of seeing the entire facility, not just the workout area. Walk through the locker rooms, exercise studios, pool area (if there is one) and any other sections that the facility may have. While touring around the facility, try to get a feel as to whether or not the atmosphere is appropriate for you. For example, make sure that the age range is suitable for your needs. Also determine if the facility caters more to certain populations. If you're looking for a family-oriented facility and it's a bodybuilding gym, you probably won't be comfortable there.

A quality facility should be clean, safe and, in general, a fun place. It should be staffed with an adequate number of personnel and they should be qualified and certified. The facility should offer a variety of programs and boast state-of-the-art equipment. In addition, the facility must be adequately prepared for emergencies. Find out if it has an automated external defibrillator (AED). Also find out how many members of the staff are trained in First Aid/CPR.

Let's look at some of the most important areas that you should check during your tour of the facility.

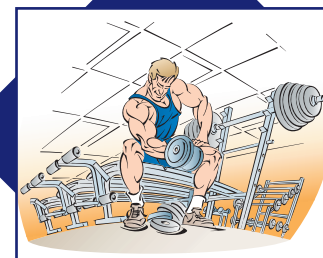
The Locker Room

Inspect the locker room to make sure that it's well kept. There shouldn't be any dirty

Chapter 7

Choosing a Fitness Facility and Personal Trainer

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towels lying around and the toilets and sinks should be clean. Check the condition of the lockers. Are they in good condition or are the doors hanging off their hinges? Ask about the locker policies. Specifically, find out if lockers are included in your membership or there's an additional charge. And if there's a charge, find out the cost. Also inquire as to whether a lock is provided or you're required to supply your own. Finally, ask if locks can be left on the lockers overnight and if there are secure places where your valuables can be kept.

The Group-Exercise Studio

Group-exercise classes are held in studios or rooms. It's important to learn if the classes are part of the membership. It's not unusual for facilities to charge an extra fee for taking classes but you should find out up front. Determine if the classes in which you're interested are available at times that are convenient for you. Find out if you can simply walk into a class without registering ahead of time. The group-exercise instructors should be certified by a reputable organization.

Check the room for adequate space and a good system of ventilation. If it doesn't have air conditioning, fans should be available to circulate the air. The flooring is also critical – it must be able to adequately absorb shock. (This will help to reduce the risk of injuries

to the ankle, knee and lower back during high-impact activities.) If there's more than one studio or room, make sure that you see them as well. Some facilities, for instance, have cycling studios. In this case, see if the room has sufficient bicycles and check their condition.

The Fitness Area

The main hub of a fitness facility is the fitness area that contains the aerobic and strength-training equipment. During your walk-through, note how many trainers are on the floor. Check to see if they're easily identifiable with staff shirts, nametags and so on. The fitness area should have a variety of equipment. In general, the equipment should be well maintained and in good working order. When touring the area, take note as to how much of the equipment has "out of order" signs. This can be a good indication of how well the equipment is maintained.

The aerobic area should have an extensive inventory of treadmills, elliptical machines, stairclimbers/steppers, rowers and stationary bicycles (both upright and recumbent). There should be enough aerobic equipment that you don't have to wait a long time to use one. Some facilities limit the amount of time that you can spend on a single piece of equipment to 30 minutes or less – at least during the peak hours of operation. (For the

most part, peak times are early in the morning, lunchtime and in the evening from about 5:00-8:00pm). If you're limited to 30 minutes at peak times, find out how the policy is monitored. Are there sign-up sheets/boards for each piece of equipment or is it on a first-come, first-served basis? Every facility has its own policies and you'll want to find this out prior to joining so that there are no surprises.

In the free-weight area, you'll find barbells, dumbbells, plate-loaded machines and weight benches. The first thing that you should check is the general condition of the area. Make sure that it's well organized. For example, the dumbbells should be "racked" – preferably in an orderly fashion (5, 10, 15 and so on) – and not just scattered around the floor. In addition, the dumbbells and racks should be clearly marked for easy recognition. The free-weight area should have adequate space to accommodate the number of people who might use it. Check to see if there are enough weight benches and whether some are of the incline and decline variety. Make sure that the weights of the dumbbells are enough to meet your needs. For making progressions in your training, the dumbbells should increase in increments of no more than five pounds. Lastly, note whether trainers are available to spot you if you need assistance.

Most facilities have an area that's set aside for selectorized machines (those in

which the resistance can be changed with a selector pin). Machines allow the user to have more control and greater safety than free weights. However, safer doesn't mean that they're better or more effective. The truth is that both types of equipment – free weights and machines – can improve your muscular strength. Check to see if the facility has updated equipment. There are many different brands of machines. Make sure the facility has equipment that fits your size. All machines should have instructional signs, posters or placards on them that explain their recommended use. The upholstery should be clean and not worn or torn.

Memberships

In researching a facility, you'll also need to learn about membership fees. The price of a membership varies from one facility to another based on numerous factors such as amenities and geographical location. Find out if the facility offers a trial membership so that you can "go for a test drive." Also find out if there's an "initiation fee" or "service fee" and, if so, the amount. These one-time fees can be as little as \$29 or as much as \$249, depending on the facility and the type of membership. Keep in mind that some facilities have a low initiation fee but require you to make a 12-month





Determine if the classes in which you're interested are available at times that are convenient for you.

commitment; others have a high initiation fee but don't require a commitment.

Monthly dues can range from about \$29 to as much as \$149. Payment of monthly dues can be done several ways such as using an electronic funds transfer (EFT) in which money is automatically taken out of your checking account every month; paying by credit card; and being billed each month. Most facilities charge monthly but some charge annually. You might get a discount if you pay your dues in full for the year.

Ask about what happens if you need to cancel your membership. Usually, you can do so if you have medical issues or are moving out of the area provided that you show proper documentation (such as a letter from your physician or proof that you're moving).

Okay, Now What?

Once you have joined a facility, you should be required to complete a comprehensive medical questionnaire in which you disclose such things as your current/past medical history, joint problems, medications and so on. A member of the staff should also measure your resting heart rate and blood pressure. The medical information is taken to let the fitness staff know whether or not you have any injuries, limitations or other issues. If you have more than one risk factor for a chronic condition – such as high blood pressure – you should be required to get a

physician's clearance prior to starting your exercise program.

Many facilities offer fitness assessments to new (and existing) members. A fitness assessment can be as simple as measuring your height and weight and reviewing your medical questionnaire. A comprehensive assessment is one that covers the five components of physical fitness: body composition, aerobic (or cardiorespiratory) fitness, muscular strength, muscular endurance and flexibility. Let's look at each of these individual tests in greater detail.

- **Body composition:** There are several ways to assess your body composition. The three most popular ways are to use skinfold calipers, bioelectrical impedance and near-infrared interactance.
- **Aerobic fitness:** Essentially, this assessment measures how much oxygen is being delivered to your working muscles. The purpose of doing this is to help establish a safe starting point for your exercise program. There are several ways to assess aerobic fitness including a three-minute step test and the Rockport Walking Test as well as pedaling a bicycle ergometer (or stationary bicycle).
- **Muscular strength:** The intent of this test is to determine how much weight you can lift for no more than 10 repetitions. (As a safety precaution, tests of one-repetition maximum strength should be avoided.)

- **Muscular endurance:** Here, the goal is to perform as many repetitions as possible. Perhaps the two most popular tests of muscular endurance are push-ups and sit-ups. Another way is do as many repetitions as possible on one or more exercises – usually a chest/bench press and/or leg press – with a percentage of your bodyweight.
- **Flexibility:** Often, a sit-and-reach test is used to measure the flexibility of your hips, hamstrings and lower back; sometimes, other body parts are assessed such as the shoulders.

After your assessment, a member of the fitness staff will usually discuss your results with you and let you know where you need improvement. Some facilities may give you a printout of your results while others may just review them verbally.

PERSONAL TRAINING

Once you've had your fitness assessment, it's time for you to start exercising. Many people decide that they want to enlist the services of a personal trainer. Personal training can be defined in many ways. The one definition that most everyone can agree on is a client who has a one-on-one relationship with a certified fitness professional. The relationship includes instruction, education

and emotional support. Through this, a client can achieve personal goals that may have been unattainable without the guidance of a personal trainer.

There are many reasons why people use personal training. For example, personal training is the best way to get the maximum results out of your time. A personal trainer can offer you motivational, technical and educational support, help you to set goals (and achieve them), make you accountable for your training and enhance your performance. One of the most valuable benefits is to provide you with an efficient and quality exercise session each and every time that you work out. A personal trainer can help you to exercise in a safer and more efficient manner, vary your workouts and establish a good routine. Moreover, a personal trainer can show you how to fit exercise into your busy schedule.

Personal trainers wear many hats: they're teachers, coaches, supporters, counselors, negotiators and advisors. Remember, clients put their bodies in the hands of personal trainers. So, personal trainers have a big responsibility but also a great opportunity to help their clients to change their lifestyles. Personal training should be highly individualized and designed to address a client's specific needs and concerns. The goal of the trainer should be to have the

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client become more independent. Be cautious of personal trainers who push supplements or exercise equipment and tell you that they can get those products for you.

The real key is finding a personal trainer who's right for you. Hiring a personal trainer is just like hiring any other kind of individual who provides a professional service. It's highly recommended that you interview personal trainers. During this process, you can determine whether or not the individual will be able to help you to achieve your short-term and long-term goals.

Personal trainers must demonstrate several qualities. Their knowledge and experience should be excellent and high on your priority list. In order for personal trainers to design safe and effective programs, they must have a solid background in anatomy and physiology, injury prevention and exercise mechanics or technique. Those who have a four-year degree in Exercise Physiology, Exercise Science, Physical Education or another fitness-related field usually possess these basics. Personal trainers who don't have a four-year degree in a relevant discipline should at least have a national certification from a credible organization. Creativity is another important characteristic that a personal trainer should have. As they say, "Variety is the spice of life." In a short period of time, a personal trainer who isn't creative could make workouts become very monotonous.

Furthermore, personal trainers should . . .

- **be committed to providing their clients with the best possible service**
- **have good rapport and personal connection with their clients to build a foundation for the entire relationship**
- **be real and authentic to form and establish trust**
- **show empathy and acceptance**
- **understand that not everyone is a competitive athlete**
- **be good communicators and even better listeners**
- **have sincerity and a genuine interest in helping their clients**
- **be motivators and know which "buttons" to push to help get their clients to achieve their goals**
- **exhibit passion for what they're doing**
- **have integrity**

Again, it's a good idea to interview personal trainers. Here are some specific questions that you should ask during the interview:

- **How long have you been a personal trainer?**
- **Who's your typical client?**
- **How will you provide motivation without intimidating or embarrassing me?**
- **How will you instruct and educate me?**
(Personal trainers should share their

wealth of knowledge in health and fitness with their clients. They can achieve this by teaching their clients something new each time that they meet.)

- **What's your educational background?**
- **Do you have a national certification? If so, which one and is it current? (Most certifications must be renewed every 2-3 years. Usually, this is accomplished by attending seminars, conferences and workshops and/or taking home-study courses.)**
- **How do you keep abreast of the latest and greatest training techniques?**
- **What professional publications do you read regularly?**
- **Do you have liability insurance? (Personal trainers who are employed by a fitness facility are usually covered under its umbrella policy; personal trainers who work either in their homes or in a client's home should have professional liability insurance.)**
- **Can you provide me with a list of past and/or current references?**

While on the subject, let's take a closer look at certifications. Currently, there's no national standard or minimum requirement to be a personal trainer. Another thing to understand is that there are many different certifying organizations but some of these

have more credibility than others. A personal trainer who's certified makes it more likely that a client will receive qualified instruction. This helps to ensure safe, high-quality service. Additionally, having a certification can help reduce liability exposure, enhance the reputation of a facility and, in general, show that the individual is a professional. Certifications demonstrate a minimum level of competence, knowledge, skills and abilities. Keep in mind, however, that being certified doesn't necessarily mean that the person is a good personal trainer.

You should find out the cost of a personal-training session and if it's cheaper to buy a "package" of hours. Some facilities and private trainers (personal trainers who aren't affiliated with a facility) offer a small discount for clients who purchase multiple sessions. In New Jersey, you can expect to pay an hourly rate of as little as \$30 to as much as \$100. Inquire about the cancellation policy, if any. Cancellation policies vary from facility to facility and from trainer to trainer. Clients who cancel their appointment without giving a 24-hour notice are usually charged. As a client, you'll need to understand that you're paying for a time slot and if you can't make your appointment, you might be taking away a time that could be given to another client. Also, find out about the billing policy. Most facilities require payment upfront prior



A personal trainer can offer you motivational, technical and educational support, help you set goals (and achieve them), make you accountable for your training and enhance your performance.



Personal trainers should set goals for you that are **SMART**:

Specific,
Measurable,
Attainable,
Realistic and
Timely.

to any personal training. It's important to know that once a contract is signed, some facilities automatically bill clients when they run out of sessions unless the clients say differently.

Other than inquiring about the cost of personal training, the most frequently asked questions pertain to the makeup and length of a session. The makeup of a personal-training session can vary based on the client's goals. For most clients, a session may be doing a total-body workout (training the entire body in one workout); for others, it may be doing several muscle groups on one day and the rest of the muscles the next. Personal-training sessions usually last 45-60 minutes. The session should be well organized and thought out ahead of time. Personal trainers should set goals for you that are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

During your session, the personal trainer should have you moving most or all of the time. Therefore, the personal trainer needs to be flexible and have alternatives available

if a certain exercise cannot be done. If you desire, the personal trainer can help to stretch you at the conclusion of your session.

Personal training is about three things that will help people improve their lives and touch them emotionally: value, benefits and results. Do you see the value that the personal trainer provides? Do you understand the benefits that you'll receive from personal training? Do you obtain the results that you want from personal training?

To find a personal trainer in your area, contact local fitness facilities or look in the phone book under "personal trainers" or "physical fitness." You can also locate personal trainers online by using a search engine. Many fitness organizations have websites with personal-trainer locators. Just remember, it's easy to find a personal trainer . . . but it's much harder to find the right personal trainer for you.



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